

# ***Chicago Daily Law Bulletin***

## **New Online Resources Available to Legal Aid Attorneys**

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A local technology center has opened the doors to a statewide Internet community for legal aid providers and pro bono attorneys.

The Illinois Technology Center for Law & the Public Interest launched two new Web sites Tuesday that will allow the state's legal services agencies to swap training information, to maintain individual listings of services and volunteer opportunities and to schedule events on an electronic calendar.

The ITC, housed in Chicago-Kent College of Law and funded in large part by the Chicago Bar Foundation, the Lawyers Trust Fund of Illinois and Legal Services Corp. in Washington, D.C., developed the online community in what is promised to be a user-friendly environment.

"We are replacing the older test site with two dynamic database-driven Web sites ... with content-management system software," said ITC Executive Director Lisa A. Colpoys. "It sounds complex," she added, "but it really allows nontechnical people like me and other lawyers to add content directly to the Web sites so they become a legal aid community online."

Contributors need only be able to use Internet browsers and basic word processing and e-mail programs, Colpoys said.

The sites, [www.illinoislegalaid.org](http://www.illinoislegalaid.org) and [www.illinoisprobono.org](http://www.illinoisprobono.org), include a list of more than 90 state agencies, most of which provide direct legal services to indigent clients. Staff members at those agencies can update the online information about the services they provide and they can add to an electronic library of legal information in 12 different practice areas -- without leaving their offices.

"We're really relying on our legal aid partners across the state to build this legal-services library," Colpoys said. "Each practice area contains information for attorneys to learn about that area of law so they can get training or support ... without having to go to the [actual] library."

The ITC has enlisted legal services attorneys from across the state to manage each of the 12 categories, and those volunteers will organize contributions and add them to a searchable database.

Private practice attorneys looking for pro bono work can visit the [illinoisprobono.org](http://illinoisprobono.org) Web site, which has a list of volunteer opportunities from each of the agencies. The

attorneys can search through that list based on criteria including the location where the work needs to be done and the field of law in which it concentrates.

"It's providing an avenue for increasing communication through legal interest groups, and the organizations really have an opportunity to reach out to the general legal community by posting volunteer opportunities," Colpoys said.

Anne Stalder Nelson, executive director of the Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic in Chicago, said the Web sites will serve as a resource that previously would have come at significant cost.

"As the director of a small legal aid clinic, this is huge for us -- it's giving us access to resources we wouldn't otherwise be able to afford," Nelson said. "It's coordinating legal services in Illinois in a way that hasn't ever been done before."

She expects the Web sites will help promote smaller legal aid providers among the general legal community, which will help attract more volunteer attorneys. Nelson, a member of the ITC Board of Directors, also said the available training materials, the online calendar and the message boards will save a lot of time in getting new interns and volunteers up to speed.

"To the small legal aid providers, it helps us do our jobs much better so we can spend more of our time doing what's important," Nelson said.

ITC board member Robert A. Graves is the executive director of the Chicago Bar Foundation, which provides funding to more than 40 local legal aid agencies, and he said the Web sites will help those agencies run more efficiently.

"It's going to reduce the duplication of efforts and it's going to increase efficiency by increasing the communication among people doing similar work," he said. "The collective knowledge comes together and saves them time that they can spend on their cases."